

Lesson 13

THE LEADERS OF ISRAEL



After defeating the Canaanites and occupying the Promised Land, the people of Israel settled there. Gradually they grew into a strong nation. But Israel had to encounter a number of enemies. The peoples that were not defeated by Israel were waiting for an opportunity to attack them.

Judges

It was essential for the Israelites to defend themselves against enemy attacks. Many able and strong leaders volunteered to lead them. These leaders, who had special talents and divine blessing to lead the people, were known as judges. As is implied by the name these leaders also acted as judges, listening to the complaints of the people, arbitrating and handing down judgments. But the Bible presents them not as judges, but as soldiers.

Israel had been under the rule of the judges for two long centuries. The book of Judges in the Old Testament describes the history of twelve judges. Deborah was one among them. These people who, with divine grace, served as the liberators of Israel were filled with the power of God. **The last of the judges was Samuel, who had also prophetic powers. First book of Samuel, chapter 1 describes the call of Samuel by God. There are two books in the Old Testament in his name.**

Kings

The Israelites who had been liberated from slavery in Egypt were directly ruled and led by God. God was their king: God Himself was their judge as well as general. He gave Israel kingdom and security. But this state of affairs came to an end during the time of prophet Samuel. The people of Israel longed for a king. Like other nations around them. They approached Samuel and harassed him with their entreaties for a king.

Samuel prayed to know the will of God. And the Lord spoke to Samuel: "Now then, listen to their voice; only you shall solemnly warn them, and show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them" (1 Sam 8:9).

Saul: the First King

Those days a young man by the name 'Saul' came to Samuel. He was going around in search of his father's missing donkeys. But God had informed Samuel about Saul's arrival much in advance. On that day Samuel received Saul as his guest. Next morning he anointed Saul. Samuel took a vial of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head. Kissing him Samuel said: **"The LORD has anointed you ruler over his people Israel. You shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their enemies all around"** (1 Sam 10:1).

'To anoint' means **'to offer in the service of God'**. **The kingship of Saul was for the purpose of serving God.** Saul was a brave ruler. But after sometime he lost favour with God because he became selfish and autocratic in his rule.

David: The Powerful Ruler

The Lord said to Samuel: "I have rejected Saul from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehem, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons" (1 Sam 16:1). Samuel acted as the Lord had commanded. Samuel anointed David, the youngest son Jesse with the oil he had taken. Since that day the spirit of the Lord dwelt strongly upon David.

Saul invited David to stay in his palace, as David was very good on the lyre. David was brave, wise and handsome; and Saul liked him very much. In the meantime, Goliath, a champion from the army of Philistines challenged the Israelites. Only David was willing to take him on. David defeated Goliath by hitting him with a stone from his sling. When the champion fell, David took Goliath's own sword and beheaded him. Saul appointed David the general of his army.

David was popular with the people. Saul could not bear the fact that the people liked David more than him. He became jealous and made many attempts to have him killed. But David never showed any grudge against Saul. Saul and his sons were killed in a battle; and there upon David became king of Israel. David was a king who wished to live and rule according to the will of God. Still, he committed a serious offence: he broke God's commandment and God punished David.

Solomon: The Wise King

Before he died, David anointed his son, Solomon as king. The reign of Solomon was the golden period in Israel's history, Solomon is known as the wise king. It was king Solomon who built a beautiful temple for the Lord in Jerusalem. In wealth and wisdom he was above all other kings on earth. Even Solomon sinned against God. His offence was idolatry. God became angry with Solomon and said that his kingdom would be divided. Accordingly, after Solomon's time, two kingdoms **Judah** and **Israel** came into being.

The kings of Israel were ordained, not to enact new laws but to administer the laws given by God. These kings had the blessings of God when they reigned to honour God's laws. But whenever they broke God's laws, they were punished.

Priests

In its early history, Israel had no priests. But when the ark and the tabernacle were made, those who were appointed to serve and protect them were called priests. This duty was entrusted to Aaron and his children. How they were anointed as priests, is described in the book of Levites. "Then Moses brought Aaron and his sons forward, and washed them with water. He put the tunic on him, fastened the sash around him and clothed him with the robe" (Lev. 8:6-7).

Priests were appointed to offer sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of the people and to bless the people in the name of the Lord. In course of time the priesthood went to the tribe of Levi. Levi was one of the twelve sons of Jacob. The three responsibilities of the priests were: serving at the altar, offering sacrifices to the Lord and teaching the laws. Priesthood was the symbol of the relationship between the people of Israel and God. The Israelites were considered as God's priestly nation.

Services of the Church

Church also has leadership functions comprising prophetic, kingly and priestly duties. This service of Jesus today continues through bishops, priests and deacons. In the universal Catholic Church, the leadership role is vested in the Pope. The religious and the lay members of the church involve and participate in this leadership role according to their calling.

The judges, kings, priests and prophets of Israel helped in the survival and growth of their nation. Similarly those involved in the church services promote the growth of the Church. Let us grow by recognizing the church leadership.

Let us Pray

O God, who called us to grow in Holiness, help us lead a life fulfilling our duties.

Read the word of God and narrate

Narrate the event related with the election of Samuel (1 Samuel 3:1-21).



Word of God for our Guidance

“Only fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart” (1 Samuel 12:24).

My decision

I will lead a life pleasing to Jesus by doing my duties faithfully.

Let us do

Pair the following

David

Solomon

Saul

Samuel

Aaron

First King

Last Judge

Priest

Wise King

Powerful king

Let us find out the answer

1. Who were known as the judges in Israel?
2. What do you mean by anointing?
3. What were the responsibilities of the priests in Israel?
4. Who is known as the successor of Peter?
5. What were the kings of Israel appointed for?